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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 000795

D FOR BARRY

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SUBJECT: TFIZ01: LEBANESE, PALESTINIAN FACTIONS UNITED IN
OPPOSITION TO IRAQ WAR

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR VINCENT M. BATTLE; REASONS 1.5 (B), (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. THE LEADERS OF 34 LEBANESE POLITICAL PARTIES AND 11 PALESTINIAN FACTIONS, A GROUPING THAT MEETS SEVERAL TIMES ANNUALLY, HELD AN "EXCEPTIONAL AND URGENT" MEETING MARCH 19. THE GROUP ISSUED A COMMUNIQUE CALLING FOR BOYCOTTING U.S. PRODUCTS, "ENCIRCLING" U.S. AND COALITION EMBASSIES, AND DENOUNCING THE SYRIAN ACCOUNTABILITY ACT. THE STATEMENT ALSO PRAISED THE PALESTINIAN INTIFADA AS THE BEST "ROAD" FOR THE PALESTINIANS VICE THE "SO-CALLED ROADMAP," AND REASSERTED THE RIGHT OF THE "RESISTANCE" TO CONFRONT ANY ISRAELI AGGRESSION. SOLIDARITY ACROSS FACTIONS HAS BEEN BUILDING THROUGHOUT THE BREWING REGIONAL CRISIS. HIZBALLAH SECRETARY GENERAL HASSAN NASRALLAH EMERGED AS THE GATHERING'S SPOKESPERSON, SUGGESTING THAT THE OTHER LEADERS CONSIDER HIM TO BE THE ACTOR BEST ABLE TO RALLY NATIONAL UNITY DURING THIS CRISIS. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) THE LEADERS OF MANY OF LEBANON'S DIVERSE, CONFESSIONALLY-BASED POLITICAL PARTIES AND 11 PALESTINIAN FACTIONS HELD AN EMERGENCY MEETING MARCH 19 TO DEVISE A "NATIONAL" APPROACH TO THE WAR IN IRAQ. FOLLOWING THE CLOSED SESSION, HIZBALLAH SYG NASRALLAH HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE. NASRALLAH SAID POLITICAL PARTY LEADERS WERE UNITED IN THEIR OPPOSITION TO THE U.S. WAR AGAINST IRAQ. HE CALLED ON ALL ARABS TO CONTINUE TO REJECT WAR, TO BOYCOTT U.S. PRODUCTS AND THE U.S. DOLLAR, AND TO "ENCIRCLE" U.S. AND COALITION EMBASSIES WORLDWIDE. NASRALLAH STRESSED THE "READINESS OF THE RESISTANCE TO MEET ANY ISRAELI AGGRESSION," AND WARNED THAT EVENTS IN IRAQ WOULD LEAD TO A REDRAWING OF THE REGIONAL MAP WITH INTERNATIONAL REPERCUSSIONS. HE ANNOUNCED THAT A NATIONAL EMERGENCY COMMITTEE WOULD BE FORMED TO COORDINATE PLANS AND THAT ANTI-SYRIAN CHRISTIAN OPPOSITION GROUP QORNET SHEHWAN WOULD BE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE. DRUZE LEADER WALID JUMBLATT APPLAUDED THE POSITION OF PRESIDENT LAHOUD AND THE MARONITE PATRIARCH FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD, AND STATED THAT WHILE NO ONE SUPPORTS SADDAM HUSSEIN, "DEMOCRACY CANNOT BE BROUGHT IN ON AN AMERICAN TANK." A WORKING LEVEL MEETING OF THE SAME FACTIONS IS SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 20 TO CONTINUE DISCUSSIONS.

¶3. (C) COMMENT: POLITICAL LEADERS' EXPRESSION OF UNITY IN OPPOSITION TO WAR IN IRAQ APPEARS PREDOMINANTLY AIMED AT PROVIDING POLITICAL COVER, GIVEN SYRIAN PRESSURE TO KEEP A LID ON LEBANON DURING THE CONFLICT. AMBASSADOR SPOKE WITH PRIME MINISTER HARIRI AND DRUZE MINISTER OF THE DISPLACED MARWAN HAMADEH ON MARCH 20, BOTH OF WHOM USED THE PHRASE "SIT-IN" TO DESCRIBE PLANS FOR POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES DIRECTED AT COALITION EMBASSIES IN BEIRUT. FORMER MP MARWAN ABU FADEL TOLD US THE MEETING AND RESULTING COMMUNIQUE WERE NECESSARY IN ORDER TO DEFLATE TENSION IN THE STREET BY EXPRESSING CONDEMNATION OF THE WAR.

¶4. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED: HIZBALLAH SYG NASRALLAH'S EMERGENCE AS THE GATHERING'S KEY SPOKESMAN MAY BE SIGNIFICANT. THERE APPEARS TO BE TACIT, IF BEGRUDGING, AGREEMENT AMONG CONFESSIONAL LEADERS THAT NASRALLAH IS THE ONLY FIGURE WHO CAN PUT SUBSTANCE BEHIND THEIR CALL FOR A UNIFIED POSITION. NASRALLAH'S CREDENTIALS AS LIBERATOR OF SOUTH LEBANON ARE WIDELY ACCEPTED BY LEBANESE OF ALL FACTIONS, HE LEADS A FORCE WHICH IS WELL PLACED TO THREATEN TO RESPOND TO ISRAELI ACTIONS DIRECTED AT LEBANON; AND HE IS COMFORTABLY UNDER THE ULTIMATE CONTROL OF BROTHER SYRIA. NASRALLAH, WHOSE ACTIONS IN PAST MONTHS SUGGEST AN INCREASING

DESIRE TO PLAY A MORE ESTABLISHMENT ROLE, MAY BE CAPITALIZING
ON THIS OPPORTUNITY TO PROMOTE HIS TWO-PRONGED PUBLIC
RELATIONS CAMPAIGN -- ONE FOR THE WEST AND ONE FOR THE
REGION. (SEPTEL). END COMMENT.

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